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Elvin Bishop, the Dixie Dregs and Stillwater.

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FRIDAY ON MY MIND: Why is Friday such a bad day in the music biz? Maybe because that's when most labels announce their layoffs, a move now occurring with depressing regularity. Last week A&M Records joined the crowd, announcing it had fired 34 employees and dissolved its Horizon label. The cutback came as a surprise, since the company has been buoyed in recent months by a chart-topping Supertramp album and healthy sales from the label's growing brigade of young British rockers.

A label spokesman called the action a precautionary measure. "We've seen the writing on the wall," the source said. "Why wait until the label gets in trouble? The whole industry is being affected by a change in buying habits and we have to change, too." It's expected that several Horizon artists, namely Dr. John, Brenda Russell and Neil Larsen, will remain at A&M.

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CHAIN MAIL: The music industry could use a little good luck these days—which probably explains why some rock 'n' roll chain letters are making the rounds at various record labels. Popline's copy came in the mail this week. Among its claims: "Col. Tom Parker received the chain—one week later he discovered Elvis Presley and Clive Davis; Infinity Records boss Ron Alexenberg lost the chain among his bills. Five days later his office was dismantled."

The chain's list of alleged respondents includes Van Morrison, Herb Alpert, Eric Clapton and Bob Welch. As is customary, you must send out 25 copies of the letter within 96 hours. The chain cautions: "Please don't send money. Promo records are OK." Popline is mailing copies to Jimmy Carter and Capricorn's Phil Walden today.

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PROVE IT ALL NIGHT: "Hep Cats From Hell," a late-night rock show hosted by critic-performer Richard Meltzer, will premiere Saturday night from 2 to 6 a.m. on KPFK (90.7 FM). Meltzer, our town's leading rock theorist, heavy-metal lyricist and sumo expert, promises a potpourri of listening thrills.

"We'll play new wave until you puke," he exclaimed, "Lots of Jim Morrison, forgotten remnants from other eras and noisy, screeching jazz." Also on the bill will be live new-wave tapes from the Hong Kong Cafe and studio guests like the much maligned Angry Samoans. "You won't hear Rickie Lee Jones, David Bowie or the Cars," Meltzer said.

□

DISC 'N' DAT: White Noise Records, whose only previous release was "Live at Surf City" by Richard Meltzer and Vom, will release a new LP by San Francisco cult sensations the Avengers next week. Three of the cuts were produced by Steve Jones of the Sex Pistols. Titles include "Uh Oh" and "The American in Me."

Due Sept. 7, from Warners, ex-Doobie Brother Tom Johnston's "Everything You've Heard Was True" and Carlene Carter's "Two Sides to Every Woman," which includes "Radio Sweetheart," an unreleased Elvis Costello song. A&M's September release schedule includes "Only Make Believe" by Bell & James (writers of Elton John's hit, "Mama Can't Buy You Love"), Rita Coolidge's "Satisfied" and Styx' "Cornerstone." □

ALBUM BRIEFS

"SECRETS." Robert Palmer. Island ILPS 9544. Palmer's albums regularly flip-flop between suave uptown soul and a grittier funk-rock blend and it's the latter style that dominates the British singer's fifth LP. "Secrets" is typical Palmer fare, a mixed bag of originals and cover versions delivered with a smooth flair that neither particularly offends or excites. His treatments of "Bad Case of Loving You" and "Can We Still Be Friends?" deviate only marginally from the originals and the strong music surrounding "Love Stop" and the Little Feat groove of "In Walks Love Again" are marred only by unremarkable lyrics. While Palmer apparently lacks the musical and lyrical resourcefulness to ever rank as a major innovator, his pleasant voice, rhythm & blues instincts and economical arrangements add up to more pleasant background music than the norm.
—DON SNOWDEN

"LEAD ME ON." Maxine Nightingale. Windsong BXL 1-3404. In 1976, Nightingale's "Right Back Where We Started From" was a crossover pop/R&B hit that failed to really establish her career. Now the English/Guyanese singer is on the way back up the charts with "Lead Me On," a wistfully evocative ballad. Her throaty vocals often lack subtlety, but she brings a happy, zestful strut to songs like "You're the Most Important Person." Every genre in the book is covered here, from gentle love songs ("Darlin' Dear") to darkly phrased rockers ("Ask Billy," "Love Me Like You Mean It"). Although Nightingale is sometimes forced to breath life into uninspired lyrics, this album doesn't contain any throwaway tracks. And it firmly reestablishes her as a talent deserving of wider recognition. —CONNIE JOHNSON

"THE JUKES." Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes. Mercury SRM-1-3793. It must have been galling for Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes to watch the Blues Brothers adopt its '60s soul-band style for one album and promptly rocket into the multi-platinum zone. "The Jukes," Southside and company's fourth album, offers a few new twists but doesn't quite match last year's excellent "Hearts of Stone" LP. For the first time, the material has been written exclusively by band members and the sound has expanded from its firm rhythm and blues base to incorporate elements of hard rock and swamp funk. The best songs here—"All I Want Is Everything," "Security," "The Time" and "Wait In Vain"—are well-conceived. Southside's gruff vocals and The Jukes' mastery of '60s soul styles makes even the more workmanlike efforts highly enjoyable. —D. S.

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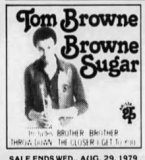

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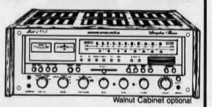
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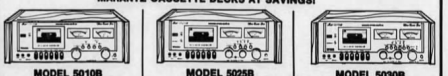

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